



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF SPRING MIGRATION FOCUSES ON WHAT HOMEOWNERS CAN DO TO ATTRACT AND CONSERVE BIRDS**

What do 65 million Americans and a billion birds have in common? The 6<sup>th</sup> annual International Migratory Bird Day on May 9, a nationwide celebration of the annual spring migration featuring hundreds of birding events at national wildlife refuges, parks, and other natural areas across the country.

The focus of this year's event is on how homeowners can attract and protect birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified 10 easy steps the average citizen can take to provide better nesting and feeding habitat and to reduce accidental bird deaths. These range from planting shrubs and trees attractive to birds to being careful to not misapply pesticides.

"Our theme this year is 'Catch the Migration Sensation' and that's what we want people to do," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "We want them to go out to a refuge or park for an International Migratory Bird Day event and enjoy the awesome spectacle of the spring migration. But we also want them to join in the day-to-day effort to conserve birds, especially the species that are in decline."

International Migratory Bird Day is a featured event of "Partners in Flight," an international coalition of Federal and state wildlife agencies, conservation groups, academic institutions, and corporations dedicated to reversing declines of migratory bird populations. Activities feature bird walks, family activities, bird banding demonstrations, and other events throughout the United States and the Western Hemisphere. These events will be held at many national wildlife refuges, parks, and forests, as well as city and state parks, National Audubon sanctuaries, and other nature reserves. Many events are posted on the IMBD web site: <http://www.americanbirding.org>. Additional information on migratory bird management can be found on the Service's home page at <http://www.fws.gov>.

Bird watching is one of America's most popular pastimes. In 1996, more than 63 million people went birdwatching, fed birds, or went on trips to watch birds and other wildlife. They spent \$29 billion generating almost \$85 billion in economic activity, creating more than 1 million jobs and producing \$5.2 billion in federal and state tax revenues.

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Unfortunately, some species of birds continue to be in trouble. During the past 30 years, populations of dozens of neotropical migratory birds and other landbirds have declined at rates exceeding 2 percent per year. These losses are not restricted to just one or two groups; warblers, tanagers, sparrows, shorebirds, seabirds, raptors and wading birds all have been affected.

"Loss and fragmentation of habitat are the main reasons for the declines," Clark said. "But there are many other problems. For example, millions of birds are killed flying into buildings and hitting television towers and 67 million birds a year die from pesticide poisoning in the United States alone."

Ten ways citizens can help conserve bird populations:

1. **Watch What You Spray** -- Each year 4 million tons of pesticides are applied in the United States. Learning the appropriate time and way to apply pesticides to lawns and gardens can make a big difference.
2. **Create Backyard Habitat** -- For weary avian travelers, backyard habitat serves as a shelter and rest stop, as well as a place to build a nest and raise young. Provide plenty of natural bird food by planting native plants which bear small berries or use a bird feeder to attract birds. Planting shrubs and evergreen trees will provide shelter, especially during the winter.
3. **Be a Responsible Cat Owner** -- Free-ranging domestic cats kill millions of birds each year in the United States. Cat owners can help reduce this unwanted loss of migratory birds by keeping cats indoors whenever possible, considering preventing pet cats from breeding, giving unwanted cats to a local animal shelter instead of releasing them in rural areas, and locating bird feeders away from heavy cover so that cats cannot surprise unsuspecting birds.
4. **Buy Shade-Grown Coffee** -- The coffee you drink can save habitat. Buying shade-grown coffee helps save trees for millions of birds that otherwise have no place to live. Check the label for certified shade-status coffee or ask your local grocer.
5. **Share Your Passion** -- If you're already hooked on birding, spread the word. Introduce others to the joys of birdwatching.
6. **Get Involved in Community Planning** -- Find out about your community's future plans for lands in your area. Green-belt areas enhance property values as well as provide habitat and protection for birds and other wildlife.
7. **Join a Bird or Garden Club** -- Become more knowledgeable about birds and actively participate in their conservation.
8. **Volunteer at a Refuge or a Park** -- You can make a rewarding and significant contribution to the future of wild birds by volunteering at a national wildlife refuge, state park, or other wildlife sanctuary.
9. **Start an Annual Bird Festival or IMBD Event** -- This is a great way to generate community spirit and create a better environment. The Fish and Wildlife Service can provide general guidance on how to do this.

10. **Donate Your Old Binoculars --** Give a new life to your old binoculars by passing them on to students and professional ornithologists in Latin America. Send binoculars in good condition or those needing a little work to: Fairfax Audubon Society, P.O. Box 82, Vienna, Virginia 22183.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service's 94 million acres include 512 national wildlife refuges, 65 national fish hatcheries, 38 wetland management districts with waterfowl production areas, 78 ecological services field stations and 50 wildlife coordination areas.

The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.